

# Phenobarbital & Mysoline® (Primidone)

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## **What is Phenobarbital?**

Phenobarbital is an anti-epileptic drug that has been successfully used to treat patients with epilepsy since 1912. It is helpful in the treatment of Partial Seizures and Generalized Tonic-Clonic Seizures. Phenobarbital is also a major product of the breakdown of Mysoline®, an anti-epileptic drug in use since 1954.

## **Starting the Medicine:**

We usually gradually increase the dose, until your body gets adjusted to the medication. Since each patient is unique in that he/she breaks down the medication differently or may need a higher or lower dosage to control their seizures, there is no standard dose that is appropriate for all patients.

## **What is the dosage of the medication and what does it look like?**

Phenobarbital comes in 15 mg, 30 mg, 60 mg and 100 mg tablets or in 400 mg/100 ml elixir.

Mysoline comes in square-shaped scored white (50 mg) or yellow (250 mg) tablets, or in 250 mg/5 ml suspension.

## **What Side Effects Can Be Caused by Phenobarbital and Mysoline®?**

Side Effects can be dose related (common) or idiosyncratic (rare):

**Common Dose-Related Side Effects:**

Double vision, nausea, drowsiness, dizziness and unsteadiness when walking may occur. These side effects are most frequent at the start of treatment, and they are temporary and usually go away as your body gets adjusted to the medicine.

If you have these side effects, your doctor may:

- reduce the individual dose by increasing the amount of times you take the medication daily.
- decrease the daily dose, and increase the bedtime dose
- instruct you to take your pill with food since this will slow the rate at which the medicine gets into the blood, but will not affect the total amount that is absorbed.

**Rare Side Effects:**

Phenobarbital and Mysoline can reduce the body's ability to manufacture certain blood cells which are important to fight infections and prevent bleeding. A reduction in these cells can cause fever, sore throat and ulcers in the mouth, or unusual bleeding and easy bruising. If these or any other unexplained and unexpected symptoms occur, contact your doctor immediately.

**Skin Rash:**

An rash can occur with Phenobarbital and Mysoline®. It tends to occur during the first weeks of therapy. If this occurs, contact your doctor immediately.

**Pregnancy:**

Women of child-bearing age should be aware that there is a small increase in risk for congenital malformations (fetal damage about 4-6% risk overall and a 0.5% risk of spina bifida). This risk increases in women taking more than one

anti-epileptic drug. Discuss this with your doctor. Mothers taking Phenobarbital or Mysoline® should not breast feed their infants.

### **How Do I Take My Medications?**

It is very important to take your medication regularly since a stable blood level helps to reduce seizures. Therefore, the medication does not work when taken on an as needed basis. It is usually prescribed to be taken once daily at bedtime. Treatment with Phenobarbital or Mysoline® may cause physical or psychological dependence. Never change the dose of your medication without consulting your doctor. These medications may impair your mental or physical abilities required for performance of tasks such as operating machinery.

NEVER use alcohol while taking Phenobarbital or Mysoline®. Alcohol has an additional depressant effect on the brain and in combination with these drugs may cause life-threatening depression of the central nervous system.

### **Can I Take Phenobarbital or Mysoline® with Other Medications?**

Yes, both may be taken with most medications. However, if more than one anti-epileptic medications are taken together, they may have complex inter-relations, sometimes necessitating adjustment in dose of either. Phenobarbital and Mysoline® may also reduce the effect of other medications: oral anticoagulants (Coumadin), Oral corticosteroids (Decadron and others), estrogen and progesterone hormones, doxycycline (Vibramycin), griseofulvine (Grifulvin and others). Always tell your doctor what other medicines you are taking.

### **What Should I Do If I Miss a Dose?**

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. **Abrupt withdrawal of Phenobarbital or Mysoline®, after continuous treatment, may provoke a flare of life-threatening severe repetitive seizures (status epilepticus).** That's

why, if your doctor recommends stopping treatment with Phenobarbital, he does so by **gradually** reducing the daily dose over several weeks.

### **Why is My Blood Checked for Phenobarbital and Mysoline®?**

The blood sample is a more accurate way to measure Phenobarbital and Mysoline in your body than counting the number of tablets that you take. This level is important in adjusting your daily dose.

It is preferred to have the Phenobarbital and Mysoline® levels checked before you take your first daily dose, so that your doctor can see what your level is at its lowest point in the day.

### **Why is My Blood Checked for a CBC with Differential and Liver Function Tests?**

Although Phenobarbital and Mysoline® rarely causes problems with blood cells or liver problems, we periodically like to check the CBC to count the number of white and red blood cells and platelets. We check the SGOT and SGPT which are indirect tests of liver function.

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